

# CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



World Health  
Organization

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Agenda Item 5.1

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**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION**  
**Eighty-sixth Session**  
**FAO headquarters, Rome, Italy**  
**1 – 5 July 2024**

**CODEX BUDGETARY AND FINANCIAL MATTERS**  
**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SUBSIDIARY MEETINGS COSTS**

## Introduction

1. In April 2024, the Codex Secretariat issued a request to host country Secretariats of active general and commodity committees (in total 14) for information on expenses incurred to host the relevant Codex committee, requesting data on the last three sessions of the Committee, reporting on one pre-pandemic session, a session held during the pandemic (2021-2022), and a post-pandemic session (2023-2024).
2. The request for information included a table with a breakdown by the following cost types:
  - Interpretation;
  - Translation of meeting documents and report;
  - Rental of premises or Conference package;
  - Audiovisual and IT support (expenses NOT associated with webcasting or virtual participation);
  - Audiovisual and IT support (expenses associated with webcasting or virtual participation);
  - Travel and accommodation expenses for host secretariat;
  - Communication;
  - Virtual Working Groups (all expenses related to the WGs including translation and interpretation); and
  - Other costs (social events, breaks, other travel expenses, communication, additional staff, security, health etc.).

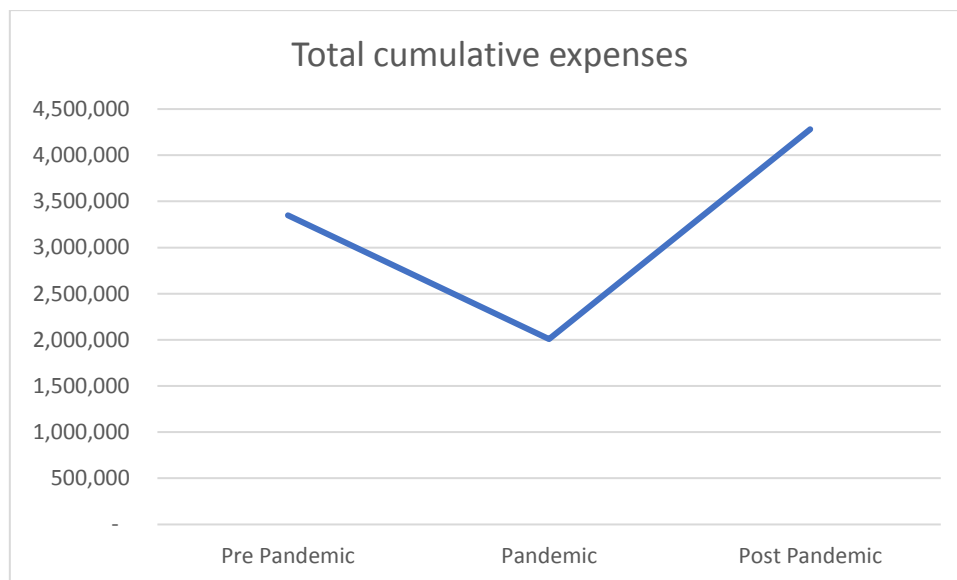
## Overview of replies

3. All host country Secretariats replied to the request for information. One reply included only total session expenses as the host country Secretariat faced challenges providing a detailed breakdown, and therefore this could not be included in the analysis. Another committee, working by correspondence, had no expenses to report.
4. The efforts of the host country Secretariats in responding to this request is well appreciated. The host country Secretariats highlighted a number of challenges in providing data. From an analysis of the responses provided, it was noted that:
  - host countries had different accounting systems, therefore classifying similar expenses under different cost types;
  - only five out of the 14 host country Secretariats were able to isolate expenses associated with webcasting and virtual participation, and only in post-pandemic sessions. Therefore, audiovisual and IT support expenses were treated as one cost type only;
  - several Secretariats could not provide isolated information on “other costs”, as the items mentioned therein had already been accounted for elsewhere, for example as part of the rental or conference package costs;
  - estimates rather than actual costs could only be provided in some cases; and
  - differences in types of expenses included in the various cost types from one session to the next for the same committee.

5. The above issues made a comparative analysis by cost type quite difficult. Also considering the confidential nature of the data provided, the following analysis focused on the general trends across all host country Secretariats for the last three reported sessions.

6. The cumulative figures representing the total expenses reported by 13 host country Secretariats show a lower level of expenses during the pandemic compared to pre-and post-pandemic times. However, one host country Secretariat indicated higher expenses during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic levels. Another host Secretariat reported lower overall expenses for the post-pandemic session compared to the pre-pandemic session because of a decrease in translation expenses.

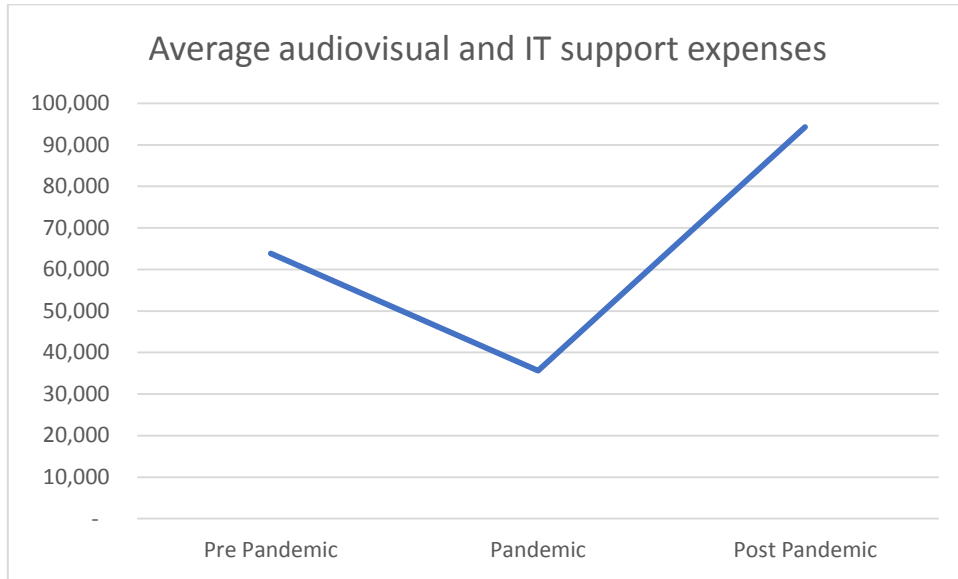
Figure 1 – Cumulative expenses of all host country Secretariats (14) (USD)



7. An analysis of the expenses by cost type was undertaken to the extent possible on the data provided by 12 host country secretariats, with the caveat that at times different expenses were under the same cost type. The narrative analysis provided below aims to illustrate general trends observed across these host Secretariats:

- Interpretation expenses have increased during the pandemic and further again after the pandemic, compared to pre-pandemic levels, however this trend was not observed in all host countries. While about half of the host country Secretariats reported higher interpretation expenses, three had either higher or lower expenses during the pandemic and returned to pre-pandemic levels afterwards.
- Translation expenses remained stable, however it is noted that the number of documents varies from session to session.
- Rental of premises were lower during the pandemic as meetings were virtual and with the return of in-person meetings returned to pre-pandemic levels.
- Audiovisual and IT support expenses increased significantly compared to pre-pandemic levels, as presented in figure 2. This could indicate higher expenses associated with webcasting or virtual participation. While five host country Secretariats were able to disaggregate expenses related to virtual participation and webcasting, in only two answers it was clear that audiovisual expenses were higher due to virtual participation and webcasting. The remaining host country Secretariats found it challenging to disaggregate expenses related to virtual participation and webcasting.
- Communication related expenses have returned to pre-pandemic levels.
- Travel and accommodation expenses were higher for the post-pandemic compared to pre-pandemic session, however these expenses varied significantly among host Secretariats, due to the session location among other factors.
- Other costs (social events, breaks, other travel expenses, communication, additional staff, security, health etc.) were higher for the post-pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic session, however, considering the different accounting systems of host Secretariats, this cost type included very different expenses from one committee to the other and a clear comparison could not be made.
- Virtual working groups started during the pandemic, therefore there were no such expenses associated with pre-pandemic sessions. These varied according to host country and the extent of support provided (e.g. interpretation).

Figure 2 – Average expenses for audiovisual and IT support (USD)



**Conclusion**

8. Collecting comparable data on which to base an analysis was challenging. Other factors such as the local context in which sessions were convened and the prevailing economic or other situation at the time, could impact the expenses associated with hosting a session. Nevertheless, the data suggest that the overall expenses for post-pandemic sessions are higher than for the pre-pandemic session. These increases seemed to specifically relate to interpretation, audiovisual and IT support and travel and accommodation. The data also highlight the extent of invaluable support provided by host country Secretariats and the challenges they face in terms of trying to provide the same level of support as expenses rise.